

Great Oaks Charter School — Board Meeting Minutes

Date: Monday, October 20, 2025

Location: Zoom

Called to Order: ~00:00:05

Adjourned: ~00:40:35

1. Call to Order & Public Comment

- Chair **Britney** called the meeting to order and confirmed the meeting was being recorded.
 - This was a regular meeting of the Great Oaks Wilmington Charter School Board.
 - Opportunity for public comment was announced.
 - No advance public comment was received via email.
 - No members of the public were present on Zoom.
 - Public comment portion was closed.
-

2. Agenda

- Chair asked if there were any additions to the agenda.
 - Board noted the need to add an **Executive Session** item for a student-related matter.

Motion: Approve Agenda

- **Motion:** Approve the submitted agenda (with Executive Session noted).

- **Moved by:** Unidentified board member (on recording).
 - **Seconded by:** Unidentified board member (on recording).
 - **Vote:** Unanimous “**aye**”; no “no” votes.
 - **Result: Agenda approved.**
-

3. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes

- Board considered the minutes from the **prior board meeting**.

Motion: Approve Prior Minutes

- **Motion:** Approve the minutes of the last board meeting.
 - **Moved by:** Unidentified board member.
 - **Seconded by:** Unidentified board member (responding “I second”).
 - **Vote:** Unanimous “**aye**”; no objections.
 - **Result: Minutes approved.**
-

4. Board Membership — Vanessa Fisher

Initial Discussion and Vote

- The board discussed adding **Vanessa Fisher** as a board member.
- Members expressed no questions or concerns about Vanessa joining.

(Initial motion & vote – later treated as informal due to quorum concerns)

- **Motion:** Approve **Vanessa Fisher** as a board member of the Great Oaks Wilmington Charter School Board.
- **Moved by:** Unidentified board member (voices “I make a motion…”).
- **Seconded by:** Unidentified board member (“I’ll second that.”).
- **Vote:** Unanimous “**aye.**”
- Immediately afterward, the board realized that Vanessa had dropped from the Zoom, raising concerns about **quorum** and whether the vote was valid.

Quorum Clarification

- The board noted that, with a member dropped from the call, they might temporarily lack quorum and agreed to **treat the earlier vote as not final** and return to it later in the meeting once quorum was clearly re-established.

Final Confirmation

- Later in the meeting, after **Vanessa rejoined** and quorum was clearly restored, the board confirmed that the vote to add **Vanessa Fisher** as a board member was valid and effective.
- Chair welcomed Vanessa: “Welcome, Vanessa! You’re officially a member of the board!”

Result:

- **Vanessa Fisher is approved and seated as a member of the Board of Directors.**
- *Mover/second for the final confirmation were not explicitly restated on the recording; the board treated the prior unanimous vote as carried once quorum was confirmed.*

5. Financial Report (Through September 30, 2025)

Presenter: Michelle (Finance)

Revenue

- Period covered: **First quarter of the fiscal year (through Sept 30)**.
- Approximately **43%** of total budgeted income has been realized as of September 30.
- **State funding:** About **71%** of state funding has been received.
- **Local (charges to school districts):**
 - One payment has been received as of September; most local preload typically arrives in **October**, so the current level is not unusual.
- **Total revenue received:** Approximately **\$1.7 million** of the **\$3.9 million** preliminary revenue budget as of Sept 30.

Discussion: Newcastle County Tax & Local Revenue Risk

- Board members discussed potential risks due to **New Castle County property tax issues** and pending lawsuits:
 - Some mortgage providers have reportedly been instructed **not** to remit tax payments while disputes are resolved.
 - Concerns that certain districts may face cash-flow pressure and could **delay payments to charters**.
 - DOE is reportedly considering a **contingency “float”** plan for districts and charters.
- Britney summarized recent legislation from the special session:
 - New Castle County residents may have had a **60–90 day extension** to pay tax bills while reassessments and relief are processed.
 - Legislation reportedly allows DOE to **float funds** to districts (and charters) during the delay, provided the funds are coded correctly (e.g., Division I constraints, etc.).
- Michelle noted:
 - Great Oaks has a **strong surplus** and should be able to withstand delayed payments if needed.

- She will keep an ear out for further DOE guidance and monitor local revenue timing closely.

Expenses

- As of Sept 30:
 - **\$673,000** expended of the **\$3.8 million** preliminary expense budget.
- Key categories & notes:
 - **Facilities & maintenance:** ~27% of budget (slightly above 25% due to timing of lease payments).
 - **Insurance:** Higher than prior year due to rate increases; reflected in the **amended budget**.
 - **Instructional support:** ~17% of budget; variances (e.g., computers/supplies) are addressed in amended budget adjustments.
 - **Transportation:** ~2% at this point; largely a timing issue; expected to increase as the year progresses.

Overall Financial Position

- Operating surplus of approximately **\$1.0 million** as of Sept 30.
 - Prior-year carryover of approximately **\$1.1 million**.
 - **Total fund balance:** about **\$2.1 million** as of Sept 30, 2025.
 - Board members commented that Great Oaks remains fiscally strong but should continue monitoring local revenue timing and DOE's contingency plans.
-

6. Approval of Financial Report

Motion: Approve Financial (Web) Report

- **Motion:** Approve the financial report (“web report”) for the period ending September 30, 2025.
- **Moved by:** Unidentified board member (“I... motioned that we vote on the financial report...”).
- **Seconded by:** Unidentified board member (“I’ll second.”).
- **Vote:** Unanimous “**aye**”; no objections.
- **Result: Financial report approved.**

(Around this time, Vanessa confirms she has been voted in; the board formally welcomes her as a new member.)

7. Amended Budget

Presenter: Michelle (Finance)

Revenue Changes

- The budget was amended now that the **September 30 unit count** is final.
- **Enrollment:**
 - Final: **141 students**, a decrease of **8 students** from the original projection.
- **Special Education profile changes:**
 - **Basic special ed units decreased.**
 - **Regular ed units decreased.**
 - **Intensive special ed units increased ~38%.**
 - **Complex special ed units increased ~50%.**
- These shifts resulted in:

- Significant increases in **charges to school districts** and **state funding** because higher-need SPED categories generate more revenue per student.
- **Federal funding:**
 - Budget now includes a **School Improvement grant** (federal pass-through), contributing additional revenue.

Net Effect on Revenue:

- Compared to the preliminary budget, total **revenue increased by approximately \$723,000.**

Expense Changes

- **Facilities & Maintenance:**
 - Increase of about **\$19,000**, due to:
 - Increased **lease costs** with CEB;
 - Higher **insurance** premiums.
- **Instructional Support:**
 - Increased by about **\$214,000**, reflecting:
 - Additional **contractual services** and supports for the expanded special education population.
- **Transportation:**
 - Increased by about **\$64,000.**
 - Some transportation expenses will be covered by the **School Improvement grant.**

Net Effect on Expenses:

- Expenses increased by approximately **\$297,000**, which is **less** than the revenue increase.

Bottom Line

- **Net improvement** in projected results: ~\$426,000.
- Anticipated operating **surplus: approximately \$579,000.**
- Board noted that the added cushion allows flexibility to further support special education students as needed.

Motion: Approve Amended Budget

- **Motion:** Approve the **amended budget** as presented.
 - **Moved by: Stacy** (“Stacy makes a motion to approve tonight’s amended budget.”).
 - **Seconded by:** Unidentified board member (“I’ll second.”).
 - **Vote:** Unanimous “**aye.**”
 - **Result: Amended budget approved.**
-

8. Audit Status & Future Presentation

- Michelle reported:
 - **Audit is finalized** (clean, no findings).
 - Audit has been sent to DOE.
- Board discussed whether to have the auditors present at a future meeting.
- Consensus: Board would like an **auditor presentation** to remain fully informed.

Action:

- Michelle to contact auditors to request a **presentation at the November 17, 2025** board meeting (the next regular meeting, third Monday).

9. School Updates

Presenters: Ms. Price (Principal) & Dr. Parana (Assistant Principal)

Staff Highlights (“Shout-Outs”)

- **Mr. Lambert** — Instructional para (1:1):
 - Highly consistent, flexible, and team-oriented; strong “whatever you need” attitude; daily presence and reliability.
- **Ms. Harrell** — Special Education Teacher:
 - Served as the **sole SPED teacher** for a significant period.
 - Maintained a positive attitude, supported new staff, began each day with a warm presence; a key asset to the school community.

Instruction & Professional Development

- School goals remain unchanged from previous month (achievement, attendance, and participation targets).
- **Walkthrough data** has fluctuated:
 - Some staff required coaching around posting objectives, adherence to curriculum, and ensuring all students are engaged.
 - Leadership is providing **accountability and support** for instructional expectations.
- **Differentiation Training:**
 - Staff completed a **state-provided PDMS training** on differentiation (aligned with the School Improvement Plan).
 - Additional PD time was spent on **curriculum fidelity** and defining **high-quality student work**.

Staffing & Supports

- Two **additional instructional paras** have joined ELA and math classrooms.
- Funds from the **School Improvement grant** are being used to support instructional staffing and after-school services.

After-School Tutoring

- Current model is **virtual tutoring** after school via **Zoom**, led by classroom teachers (e.g., Ms. Sneed).
- Students can log in from phones or home to receive **direct math and ELA help** from their teachers.
- Rationale:
 - Many students work or have responsibilities after school; virtual format is intended to reduce barriers.
- Participation:
 - Student turnout is currently **low**; the team is working to build awareness and momentum.
- Tools:
 - Use of **Google Classroom** and shared screens to walk students through assignments and questions in real time.
- Board feedback:
 - Members praised the **instructor-led, accessible** design.
 - A parent board member requested more **parent-facing communication**, such as:
 - Flyers, QR codes, and reminders sent directly to parents, not only via students.

Climate & Culture

- In-school suspension (ISS) is being used with a **restorative focus**:

- Time to reflect on choices and discuss what to do differently.
- Opportunity for students to **catch up on missing work**.
- Director of Climate engages students in conversations to reset expectations and refocus them.

College & Career, Activities, and Athletics

- Preparing for **College Application Week**.
- Weekly visits/presentations by various **postsecondary programs**:
 - Not only colleges, but also **job training** and **trade/skill programs**.
 - Many students are increasingly interested in trades; the school aims to show a **wide range of postsecondary options** earlier, rather than waiting too late in the year.
- **Basketball & Cheerleading**:
 - Basketball and cheerleading tryouts are underway.
 - A student-initiated push for a **girls' basketball team** resulted in enough interest to form a team — a positive development.

Operations & Recruitment

- Preparing for **School Choice** season for next year:
 - Great Oaks has been invited early to middle school fairs at **CSNC** and **Columba** — a positive shift from needing to push for invitations.
- Continuing **home visits** for students with **low attendance / low show**:
 - An advocate conducts wellness checks, asks about barriers to attendance, and offers support.
 - As a result, **6 students** have returned from the low-show list to regular attendance.

Staffing Updates

- A **certified Special Education Teacher** started this week.
- The **School Counselor** has also started.
- SPED department is now **fully staffed**.

SPED & Compliance (Dr. Parana)

- Completed **prong one of compliance monitoring**; required corrections have been made.
- **Current SPED caseload: ~63 students** — still heavy for two SPED teachers, making para support critical.
- **McKinney-Vento**: Continues to see a steady flow of students qualifying as homeless; situation remains dynamic.
- **Due Process**:
 - Working on an **offer to settle** a due process complaint involving a student; details to be discussed in Executive Session.

School Improvement Grant – Strategic Use

- School Improvement award: **\$143,800**.
- Leadership focus: use funds for **high-impact instructional support**, including:
 - An **instructional coach** for ELA and math (position still to be hired).
 - **After-school tutoring** (including transportation once in-person tutoring ramps up).
 - **Instructional paras** in all ELA and math classes.

Board Feedback & Discussion

- Board members expressed strong appreciation for:

- The structured **slide-based updates**.
 - Clear visibility into goals, walkthroughs, climate, and supports.
 - The hard work on **September 30th unit count**, recruitment, and staffing.
 - Multiple board members explicitly commended Ms. Price, Dr. Parana, and the leadership team for “**knocking it out of the park**” and doing “phenomenal” work under challenging circumstances.
 - Board Chair also floated the idea (with Kendall) of a **citywide recruitment working group**, potentially including:
 - Great Oaks, Freire, other city charters, and partners such as the county or Aspira, to coordinate strategies for recruiting and serving similar student populations.
-

10. Motion to Enter Executive Session

Motion: Move to Executive Session

- **Motion:** Move that the Board go into **Executive Session** to discuss student- and legal-related matters (including due process).
- **Moved by:** Unidentified board member (“I motion that we move to Executive Session.”).
- **Seconded by:** Unidentified board member (“I second.”).
- **Vote:** Unanimous “**aye**.”
- **Result:** Board moved into **Executive Session**.

(Executive Session discussion is confidential and not recorded in these minutes.)

11. Adjournment

- After returning from Executive Session, general conversation concluded with light remarks about football teams and upcoming games.
 - No further business was raised.
 - Meeting effectively **adjourned** following the close of Executive Session and final comments.
-

Summary of Motions & Votes

1. Approve Agenda

- **Moved by:** Unidentified board member
- **Seconded by:** Unidentified board member
- **Result:** Approved unanimously

2. Approve Prior Minutes

- **Moved by:** Unidentified board member
- **Seconded by:** Unidentified board member
- **Result:** Approved unanimously

3. Approve Addition of Vanessa Fisher as Board Member

- **Moved by:** Unidentified board member
- **Seconded by:** Unidentified board member
- **Result:** Approved unanimously; confirmed once quorum restored

4. Approve Financial Report (Web Report)

- **Moved by:** Unidentified board member
- **Seconded by:** Unidentified board member

- **Result:** Approved unanimously

5. **Approve Amended Budget**

- **Moved by:** Stacy
- **Seconded by:** Unidentified board member
- **Result:** Approved unanimously

6. **Enter Executive Session**

- **Moved by:** Unidentified board member
- **Seconded by:** Unidentified board member
- **Result:** Approved unanimously

Action Items

1. **Michelle (Finance)**

- Monitor local revenue timing and DOE contingency planning related to New Castle County tax issues.
- Invite **auditors** to present the finalized audit at the **November 17, 2025** board meeting.

2. **Ms. Price & Dr. Parana**

- Continue implementation of School Improvement Plan, differentiation PD, and walkthrough supports.
- Finalize hiring for **instructional coach** for ELA and math.

3. **Leadership / Tutoring Team**

- Increase **communication to parents** regarding virtual tutoring (e.g., flyers, QR codes, parent reminders).

- Track student participation and adjust outreach to improve usage.

4. **Operations / Family Engagement**

- Follow up with photographer/vendor to arrange a **senior picture make-up day**.
- Continue **home visits** and supports for low-attendance students.

5. **Leadership & Enrollment Team**

- Develop a **strategic recruitment plan** for 2026–27, building on lessons learned.
- Participate, if pursued, in a **citywide recruitment working group** with other Wilmington schools